Supreme Court, U. S.
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IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1972

No. 72-1142

BRYAN MELTON and WIFE, MRS. BRYAN MELTON, on behalf of their minor son, ROD MELTON,

Petitioners,

—v.—

CORLEY R. YOUNG, MRS. C. M. HOOPER, REV. H. H. BATTLE, JAMES L. JENKINS, G. PAUL SAMS and WILLIAM D. LEBER, The Board of Education of Chattanooga, Tennessee, S. DEAN PETERSEN, Commissioner of the Board; DR. B. L. VON SCHAAF, Principal of Brainerd High School, Chattanooga, Tennessee,

Respondents.

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SIXTH CIRCUIT

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INDEX

PAGE

Opinions Below 2

Jurisdiction 2

Question Presented 2

Statement of the Case 2

Reasons for Granting the Writ 8

Conclusion 14

Appendix:

Opinion of the United States Court of Appeals .. 1a

Order of the United States Court of Appeals Denying Petition for Rehearing 14a

Opinion of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee 16a

Judgment of the United States District Court 37a

Table of Authorities

Cases:

Banks v. Muncie Community Schools, 433 F.2d 292 (7th Cir. 1970) 13

Blackwell v. Issaquena County Board of Education, 363 F.2d 749 (CA 5, 1966) 9

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) 13

Burnside v. Byers, 363 F.2d 744 (CA 5, 1966) 9

Butts v. Dallas Independent School District, 436 F.2d 728 (5th Cir. 1971) 9-10, 13

PAGE

Caldwell v. Craighead, 432 F.2d 213 (6th Cir. 1970) 13
Cohen v. California, 403 U.S. 15 (1971) 8, 11, 12
Crews v. Cloncs, 432 F.2d 1259 (7th Cir. 1970) 12

Edwards v. South Carolina, 372 U.S. 229 (1963) 11, 12

Grayned v. City of Rockford, 408 U.S. 104, 33 L. Ed.2d 222 (1972) 9
Gregory v. Chicago, 394 U.S. 111 (1969) 11-12

Healy v. James, 408 U.S. 169, 33 L. Ed.2d 226 (1972) ..8, 11
Hill v. Lewis, 323 F. Supp. 55 (E.D. N.C. 1971) 10

James v. Board of Education, 461 F.2d 566 (2d Cir. 1972) 10, 13

Massie v. Henry, 455 F.2d 779 (4th Cir. 1972) 12

Russo v. Central School District, —— F.2d ——, 41 Law Week 2291 (2d Cir. 1972) 10

Shanley v. Northeast Independent School District, 462 F.2d 960 (5th Cir. 1972) 10, 13
Smith v. St. Tamany Parish School Board, 316 F. Supp. 1174 (E.D. La. 1970), *aff'd* 448 F.2d 414 (5th Cir. 1971) 13

Tate v. Board of Education of Jonesboro, Arkansas, 453 F.2d 975 (8th Cir. 1972) 12, 13
Terminiello v. Chicago, 337 U.S. 1 (1949) 11
Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503 (1969) 7, 8, 9, 10

Williams v. Eaton, 468 F.2d 1079 (10th Cir. 1972) 9

PAGE

Constitutional Provisions:

United States Constitution
First Amendment 2, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14
Fourteenth Amendment 2

Statutes:

28 U.S.C. § 1254(1) 2
42 U.S.C. § 1983 6

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No. .....

BRYAN MELTON and WIFE, MRS. BRYAN MELTON, on behalf of their minor son, ROD MELTON,

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—v.—

CORLEY R. YOUNG, MRS. C. M. HOOPER, REV. H. H. BATTLE, JAMES L. JENKINS, G. PAUL SAMS and WILLIAM D. LEBER, The Board of Education of Chattanooga, Tennessee, S. DEAN PETERSEN, Commissioner of the Board; DR. B. L. VON SCHAAF, Principal of Brainerd High School, Chattanooga, Tennessee,

Respondents.

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SIXTH CIRCUIT

Petitioners pray that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals, entered in the above entitled case on August 30, 1972, petition for rehearing denied November 21, 1972.

Opinions Below

The opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit is reported at 465 F.2d 1332 and is set forth in the Appendix, *infra,* at pp. 1a-13a. The decision of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee is reported at 328 F. Supp. 99 and is set forth in the Appendix, *infra,* at pp. 16a-36a.

Jurisdiction

The opinion and judgment of the Court of Appeals were entered on August 30, 1972. A timely-filed petition for rehearing was denied on November 21, 1972 (App., *infra,* pp. 14a-15a). The jurisdiction of the Court is invoked under 28 U.S.C. Section 1254(1).

Question Presented

Whether the First and Fourteenth Amendments permit school officials to punish a high school student for engaging in expressive activity, consisting solely of wearing in school a small patch replica of a Confederate flag on the sleeve of his jacket, because reaction to the use of that emblem as an official school symbol had been one cause of serious racial tensions and substantial disorders at the school during the previous academic year?

Statement of the Case

On September 8, 1970 the petitioner, Rod Melton, a white student at Brainerd High School, Chattanooga, Tennessee, came to school wearing a nylon jacket with a small emblem

depicting a Confederate flag (App., *infra,* p. 4a). His avowed purpose in wearing the symbol was to express pride in his Confederate heritage (App., *infra,* p. 4a). He said nothing to anybody, urged no one to wear the insignia, made no speeches, handed out no emblems (TT. 530-37).*

During the morning, a faculty member informed Dr. Von Schaaf, the principal, that the petitioner was wearing the emblem, and he was summoned to the principal's office (App., *infra,* p. 24a). He was asked to remove the jacket, was threatened with prosecution if he incited a riot, but allowed to return to the class with the jacket on (App., *infra,* p. 24a, PI 29-30). By noon, two assistant principals had told Dr. Von Schaaf that several students had complained about the patch and that it was "causing tension to arise among the student body" (PI 30).[1] The petitioner was called back to the principal's office and told that the emblem was provocative and thereby in violation of the principal's recently promulgated rule prohibiting "provocative symbols on clothes" (App., *infra,* p. 24a). Being told either to remove his jacket or leave the campus, the petitioner went home.

He returned to school the next day, again wearing the jacket with the emblem. Once again he was called to the

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* "PI—" refers to the preliminary injunction hearing. "TT—" refers to the transcript of trial.

[1] At the trial Dr. Von Schaaf described the reports he received as follows:

> Q. Did the teacher or your assistant tell you that the learning process was being disturbed? A. The report was that it was causing disruptions and comments among students and that it was causing a problem in the classrooms.
>
> Q. How was this manifested? A. By the seemingly increase of active conversions, et cetera.
>
> Q. By talk, in other words? A. Yes (TT. 451).

principal's office and instructed to leave school and not return unless he removed the patch. When he refused to do so, he was suspended indefinitely, with a letter to his parents stating that the emblem had caused "some consternation among the students and faculty."

The justification subsequently offered for the principal's forecast that the petitioner's emblem would be provocative and could cause disruption was based upon the disturbances experienced at the school during the 1969-70 academic year (App., *infra*, pp. 5a-6a, 34a-35a). Brainerd High School was integrated in 1966, by federal court order. Integration seemed to proceed smoothly until the fall of 1969. At that point the use of the Confederate flag as the school symbol and the song "Dixie" as the school pep song became an issue with a number of the black students, who comprised approximately 15 percent of the student body (App., *infra*, pp. 2a-3a, 18a-19a). On three occasions in September and October 1969, black students protested the use of these official symbols by walking out of pep rallies. During the halftime at a football game, some black students went out on to the field and attempted to burn a Confederate flag. In turn, the following week, several hundred white students staged a walkout in response to rumors that the Confederate flag and "Dixie" were going to be eliminated as school symbols.[2]

Though the racial situation at the school remained tense, there were no further, major disruptions until April 1970, when confrontations between black and white students led to the closing of school for several days. One of the grievances of the black students was the continued use of the

[2] The dispute subsequently involved members of the community and caused the imposition of a curfew for four nights.

Confederate flag and "Dixie" as official school symbols. Order was restored and the academic year concluded.

There was absolutely no evidence that the wearing of the Confederate emblem as a *personal* expression of views was offensive to the black students or played any role in the disturbances (TT. 412, 437). Indeed, the petitioner wore the same patch almost daily throughout the 1969-70 academic year without incident. The objection was always to the official use of Confederate symbolism (TT. 80).

During the summer of 1970 a biracial Advisory Committee met to review the difficulties which had faced Brainerd High the previous year. The Committee identified, as one of the seven factors contributing to tensions, the Confederate symbolism used by the school, particularly the nickname "Rebel", the song "Dixie" and the Confederate flag. In July, the school board adopted the Committee's recommendations that the "Rebel" nickname be retained, but the flag and song be discontinued as official school symbols.[3]

Against this background, the principal determined that the petitioner's wearing a replica of a Confederate flag as a personal symbol would be provocative and disruptive. In the District Court's view, the Confederate symbol had been one cause of the previous year's disruption, the principal anticipated a tense situation at the start of the 1970-71 year, and he feared repetition of the difficulties if student use of the Confederate symbol were permitted (App., *infra*, pp. 34a-35a).

Overlooked were the following significant factors, noted by the dissenting opinion below:

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[3] The principal testified that the black students did not object to the nickname "Rebels" because they too could identify with it (TT. 371-72).

—The previous year's protests were directed at the use of the Confederate flag as an official symbol not a personal emblem; elimination of official sanction presumably ameliorated the black students' grievances and alleviated the situation;

—At a football game held the week before school started and played against an all black high school, spectators waived Confederate flags without incident;

—The petitioner's small, personal symbol, worn as part of an article of clothing and in a quiet peaceful manner had no inherent potential for causing disruption;

—The complaints received by the principal were minimal if not trivial, and the principal made no inquiry as to whether the use of the personal symbol would cause any substantial difficulty (App., *infra,* pp. 10a-12a).

In addition the principal testified that, following the petitioner's suspension, he allowed other symbols to be displayed at the school, including peace and ecology symbols (TT. 392, 410), because he did not find them provocative or disruptive.

This was the factual setting in which the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee (Wilson, C.J.) considered the petitioner's civil rights act complaint for declaratory and injunctive relief, brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. Section 1983. Following a hearing in October 1970, it was stipulated that the petitioner would return to school, without wearing his patch, pending the final resolution of the issues. After a three day hearing in the spring of 1971, the District Court entered its opinion. First, the Court held that the principal's regulation, prohibiting

the wearing of "provocative" symbols, was unconstitutionally vague and lacked the precision and specificity required in the First Amendment area (App., *infra,* pp. 28a-30a). However, the Court further ruled that the principal had authority, independent of the particular regulation, to maintain school discipline. Accordingly the Court went on to consider whether the petitioner's suspension violated the First Amendment. Finding this Court's decision in *Tinker* v. *Des Moines Independent Community School District,* 393 U.S. 503 (1969) to be distinguishable, the District Court concluded that the suspension was justified.

On appeal, the Sixth Circuit, in a 2 to 1 decision, affirmed the District Court. Writing for the majority, District Judge Keith (sitting by designation) held that the prior difficulties involving the Confederate flag justified the principal's prediction that disruption would occur if the petitioner were permitted to wear his insignia, and therefore, validated the suspension of the petitioner for his refusal to cease wearing it.

Circuit Judge Miller dissented. In his view, once the District Court found the "provocative symbol" rule void, it could not be applied to justify the suspension. Assuming that it could, Judge Miller found that the difficulty experienced in the previous academic year, which was focused on the use of official symbols, provided no justification for punishing the wearing of a personal symbol the following year. In Judge Miller's view, the evidence in this case "clearly brings it within the ambit of *Tinker,*" (App., *infra,* p. 10a).

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

Certiorari should be granted because the decision of the Court of Appeals conflicts with applicable decisions of this court, particularly *Tinker* v. *Des Moines Independent Community School District, supra,* which establishes the right of freedom of expression by public school students, and *Cohen* v. *California,* 403 U.S. 15 (1971) limiting the extent to which speech can be abridged because of the potential audience reaction to it. Further, the decision below reflects the need for this Court again to consider the parameters of freedom of expression in our high schools and to define the conditions, if any, which justify its abridgment. In particular, two issues, apparently unresolved by *Tinker,* require resolution: (1) what conditions justify the prediction by school officials that disruption will result from expressive activity, and (2) can the hostile reaction of other students, actual or threatened, provide the basis for suppressing speech?

1. This Court's decision in *Tinker,* properly applied, should have easily disposed of this case in a manner favorable to the petitioner. For presumably *Tinker* afforded complete First Amendment protection to the petitioner's "silent, passive expression of opinion, unaccompanied by any disorder or disturbance *on the part of petitioner.*" 393 U.S. at 508 (emphasis added). On the campus, as in the community at large, mere advocacy of ideas, particularly in such a passive medium and no matter how controversial, "is entitled to full protection." *Healy* v. *James,* 408 U.S. 169, 33 L. Ed.2d 226, 286 (1972). Only when that expression merges with *conduct* by the speaker which materially disrupts classwork or involves substantial disorder or in-

vades the rights of others may school officials intervene. *Grayned* v. *City of Rockford,* 408 U.S. 104, 33 L. Ed.2d 222, 233 (1972).[4]

Nevertheless, the proper interpretation of *Tinker* divided the court below, with the majority believing that previous disturbances justified the principal's fears that the petitioner's symbol would be disruptive, and the dissent thinking otherwise. Such disagreement is not unusual, for in many cases both students and school officials equally rely on *Tinker* to support their contrary contentions. See, *e.g., Williams* v. *Eaton,* 468 F.2d 1079, 1083 (10th Cir. 1972). Similarly, on virtually identical facts, courts have both allowed and disallowed the wearing of armbands as a symbol of protest. Compare, *Butts* v. *Dallas Independent*

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[4] In *Grayned,* this Court upheld an anti-noise ordinance which prohibited disturbing classes. The Court's discussion of *Tinker* is illuminating because it makes clear that the focus of the inquiry must be on the actions of the speaker:

> The wearing of armbands was protected in Tinker because the students "neither interrupted school activities nor sought to intrude in the school affairs or the lives of others. They caused discussion outside of the classrooms, but no interference with work and no disorder." Id. at 514. Compare Burnside v. Byers, 363 F.2d 744 (CA 5, 1966), and Butts v. Dallas Independent School District, 436 F.2d 728 (CA 5, 1971), with Blackwell v. Issaquena County Board of Education, 363 F.2d 749 (CA 5, 1966). 33 L. Ed.2d at 233.

The contrast between *Burnside* and *Blackwell,* relied on in *Tinker,* is significant. In *Burnside,* the court held that the mere wearing of freedom buttons by black students, unaccompanied by improper conduct by those students, was not inherently disruptive. On the other hand, in *Blackwell* the students accosted others, forced the buttons on them, and threw the buttons through windows, causing the court to conclude that "the reprehensible conduct described above was so inexorably tied to the wearing of the buttons that the two were not separable." 363 F.2d at 754.

Here, of course, the petitioner's activity parallels *Burnside.* He simply wore his Confederate patch, nothing more. The insignia generated some discussion and a few complaints.

School District, 436 F.2d 728 (5th Cir. 1971) (allowing anti-war armbands even though the issue provoked threatened boycotts, sit-ins, mass rallies and counter-demonstrations) with, *Hill* v. *Lewis,* 323 F. Supp. 55 (E.D. N.C. 1971) (prohibiting anti-war armbands in a similar factual setting).

Such divergent results are likely to continue unless this Court further elaborates those criteria and conditions which allow school officials to prohibit or punish expressive activity. The Fifth Circuit recently noted that the *Tinker* standard, which has been interpreted as allowing officials to intervene when they reasonably forecast substantial disruption of or material interference with school activities, is not an easy one to apply. *Shanley* v. *Northeast Independent School District,* 462 F.2d 960, 970-71 (5th Cir. 1972); see also, *James* v. *Board of Education,* 461 F.2d 566 (2d Cir. 1972) (upholding the right of a high school teacher to wear an anti-war armband in school); *Russo* v. *Central School District,* —— F.2d ——, 41 Law Week 2291 (2d Cir. 1972) (allowing a teacher to refuse to participate in the pledge of allegiance). Consequently, uncertainties in the *Tinker* rule have been utilized by school officials to prohibit protected expression. However, as the Fifth Circuit has held:

> . . . The precedential value of the Tinker decision is [not to be] nullified whenever a school system is confronted with disruptive activities or the possibility of them. Rather we believe that the Supreme Court has declared a constitutional right which school authorities must nurture and protect, not extinguish, unless they find the circumstances allow them no practical alternative. *Butts* v. *Dallas Independent School District, supra,* 436 F.2d at 732.

This Court should grant review to clarify these issues.

2. Just as the majority below allowed the petitioner to be punished solely for a silent, passive expression of opinion, it also allowed suppression of his particular message because of the anticipated reaction of other students to that message. The petitioner argued, and the dissent agreed, that his wearing a Confederate emblem as a *personal* symbol would not and should not prompt a hostile, disruptive response by black students—who had succeeded in eliminating the flag as an official school symbol—any more than should the wearing of a Cross or Star of David as a personal symbol. The majority opinion thought otherwise and held that the possibility of such a response justified the prohibition of such Confederate symbols. The case thus squarely raises the issue of whether the "special characteristics of the school environment" afford to students of one persuasion a veto power over the First Amendment rights of students who hold contrary views.

In *Healy* v. *James, supra,* this Court held that its precedents "leave no room for the view that, because of the acknowledged need for order, First Amendment protections should apply with less force on college campuses than in the community at large." 33 L. Ed.2d at 279. The question here is whether the First Amendment prohibition on a heckler's veto applies with "less force" on high school campuses.

It is now well settled that the possible reactions of a hostile audience cannot justify the suppression of speech, see *Terminiello* v. *Chicago,* 337 U.S. 1 (1949), *Cohen* v. *California,* 403 U.S. 15 (1971), particularly when racial issues are involved, see, *e.g., Edwards* v. *South Carolina,* 372 U.S. 229 (1963); *Gregory* v. *Chicago,* 394 U.S. 111

(1969).[5] A municipality could no more prohibit the wearing of the Confederate insignia on its streets than it could prevent the wearing of the black liberation emblem.[6] This Court made it clear in *Cohen* that there can be only one constitutional response to the argument that a hostile audience can veto speech:

> There may be some persons about with such lawless and violent proclivities, but that is an insufficient base upon which to erect, consistently with constitutional values, a government power to force persons who wish to ventilate their dissident views into avoiding particular forms of expression. 403 U.S. at 23.

Petitioner submits that the "special characteristics of the school environment" cannot constitutionally justify a different rule, one which allows speech to be prohibited because those hostile to it may provoke disruption.[7] The Fifth Circuit has suggested the proper First Amendment rule:

> . . . those students who would reasonably exercise their freedom of expression should not be restrained or punishable at the threshold of their attempts at ex-

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[5] *Edwards* and *Gregory*, among other cases, hold that the possibility of hostility by whites cannot justify preventing the exercise of First Amendment rights by blacks. This case presents exactly the opposite side of the constitutional coin.

[6] We assume that the ideas conveyed by either symbol could not be characterized as "fighting words" and proscribed for that reason. See *Tate* v. *Board of Education of Jonesboro, Arkansas*, 453 F.2d 975 (8th Cir. 1972) (holding the playing of "Dixie" was not the equivalent of "fighting words").

[7] In hair length cases, at least two Circuits have squarely held that the right of high school students to wear long hair may not be infringed because of the harassment and disturbance caused by other students. *Massie* v. *Henry*, 455 F.2d 779, 783 (4th Cir. 1972); *Crews* v. *Cloncs*, 432 F.2d 1259, 1265-66 (7th Cir. 1970).

> pression merely because a small, perhaps vocal or violent, group of students with differing views might or does create a disturbance. *Shanley* v. *Northeast Independent School District, supra,* 462 F.2d at 974.

Rather than allowing one group of students to veto the views of another, schools must teach students "mutual respect for each other's constitutional rights." *Butts* v. *Dallas Independent School District, supra,* 436 F.2d at 732. Only through vigorous debate can schools fulfill their "central role in preparing their students to think and to analyze and to recognize the demagogue." *James* v. *Board of Education, supra,* 461 F.2d at 574.

For almost two decades the federal courts have been involved in the enterprise of fulfilling the mandate of *Brown* v. *Board of Education,* 347 U.S. 483 (1954). The problems posed by the use and retention, as official school symbols, of the emblems of the Confederacy have been substantial. See, *e.g., Banks* v. *Muncie Community Schools,* 433 F.2d 292 (7th Cir. 1970) (holding that students had a First Amendment right to adopt Confederate symbols as official school symbols); *Tate* v. *Board of Education of Jonesboro, Arkansas, supra* (holding that black students could be disciplined for walking out of a pep rally when "Dixie" was played); *Caldwell* v. *Craighead,* 432 F.2d 213 (6th Cir. 1970), *cert. denied* (allowing the discipline of a black band member who refused to play "Dixie"); *Smith* v. *St. Tamany Parish School Board,* 316 F. Supp. 1174 (E.D. La. 1970), *aff'd,* 448 F.2d 414 (5th Cir. 1971) (directing the removal of all Confederate flags from the school, but allowing students to wear their own personal Confederate insignia

and buttons). Eliminating the officially sanctioned use of symbols offensive to black students is one thing, prohibiting students from wearing personal symbols expressive of their personal views is quite another. The national imperative of providing racial equality in education should not be sought at the expense of the First Amendment.

CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, certiorari should be granted.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX

Opinion of the United States Court of Appeals

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS

FOR THE SIXTH CIRCUIT

No. 71-1704

BRYAN MELTON AND WIFE, MRS. BRYAN MELTON, on behalf of their minor son, ROD MELTON,

Plaintiffs-Appellants,

v.

CORLEY R. YOUNG, *et al.* (Chattanooga, Tenn. Board of Education, Commissioner and Principal),

Defendants-Appellees.

APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE

Decided and Filed August 30, 1972

Before: MILLER, *Circuit Judge,* KENT, *Circuit Judge* and KEITH,* *District Judge.*

KEITH, *District Judge.* This is an appeal from a judgment of the District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee determining that the suspension of appellant Rod Melton from Brainerd High School at Chattanooga, Tennessee was not violative of his constitutional rights.

Appellant[1] instituted this action in the District Court under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for declaratory and injunctive relief

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* Honorable Damon J. Keith, United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan, sitting by designation.

[1] When used through this opinion "appellant" refers to the minor, Rod Melton.

alleging appellant's various constitutional rights were violated because the principal of his high school suspended him for wearing an emblem depicting a Confederate flag on the sleeve of his jacket.

The background of this case is recited in the extensive opinion entered by the District Judge and we will merely capsulize the factual circumstances leading to appellant's suspension.

Brainerd is a public high school in the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Until 1966 Brainerd was operated as an all white school which had adopted as its nickname the word "Rebel" and used the Confederate flag as the school flag along with the song Dixie as its pep song. The school has been attended by both white and black students since 1966; by 1969 the student body consisted of 170 black and 1224 white students.

The record indicates that with the advent of the 1969 school year the student body became racially polarized as a result of continuing controversy over the use of the Confederate flag and the song Dixie at various school functions. It also appears that on October 8, 1969 demonstrations took place at the school which disrupted classes and that on the evening of the same day a motorcade drove through various parts of the city waving Confederate flags. Thereafter various disturbances took place in the city finally culminating in the imposition of a city-wide curfew for four nights from October 13 through October 17, 1969. The District Court also found that throughout the remainder of the fall semester considerable racial tension existed within the student body which continued on into the following spring. During this period it was necessary to call for police assistance amid several confrontations and also to

close the school for the purpose of restoring order and calming tensions.

In May, 1970, the Brainerd school administration and P.T.A. appointed a committee of citizens to study the difficulties of the past year and recommend remedial action for the ensuing year. Among the conclusions of the committee were the nickname "Rebel," the song Dixie, and the Confederate flag were precipitating causes of tension and disorder within the school. As a corrective measure the committee recommended that the use of the Confederate flag as a school symbol and the use of the song Dixie as the school pep song be discontinued but that the nickname "Rebel" be retained. These recommendations were adopted as official policy by the School Board at its meeting on July 8, 1970 along with the directive to school administrators that each principal develop and disseminate within the student body a "code of conduct"[2] consistent with the recommendations by the opening of the school in September, 1970. It is this code and the consequences of its enforcement that gave rise to this lawsuit.

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[2] Relevant portions of the code provided as follows:

a) "Also, provocative symbols on clothing will not be allowed."

b) Re: Brainerd High School _____year 1970-71

SYMBOLS:

According to the Board of Education, July 8th, 1970, meeting the status of symbols for Brainerd High School is as follows:

The Confederate Flag and Confederate Soldier cannot be used as symbols for any public school in Chattanooga, therefore, all displays of the Flag and Soldier are removed from the school premises and cannot be used in any display where Brainerd is involved.

SONG DIXIE:

The song "Dixie" can no longer be used as a fight or pep song at Pep Meetings, Athletic contests or other school functions. It may be played in concert when other music of similar kind composes the program.

Appellant, after both he and his parents were informed of the new rules, wore a jacket to school with an emblem depicting a Confederate flag on one sleeve. He was asked to remove the emblem or cease wearing the jacket while in school by the principal but declined to do so. After he was allowed to return to class several complaints from both faculty and students caused the principal to call appellant to his office and request him to remove the jacket, which request was again refused. The principal then indicated that it was his judgment that the emblem was "provocative" and in violation of the school code and thereupon he directed that appellant either remove the jacket or leave the school. Appellant chose to absent himself from the campus.

The following day appellant presented himself at the school with the same jacket and emblem and upon being sent to the principal's office and being requested to remove the jacket stated that he was merely demonstrating pride in his Confederate heritage by the wearing of the flag and that he had no other motive. Appellant was then told to leave school and not return until he was willing to stop displaying the Confederate emblem while in school. The above two suspensions occurred on September 8 and September 9, 1970 respectively and letters were sent to appellant's parents on both occasions stating the reasons for the suspension.

The District Court issued an opinion finding, inter alia, that the portion of the school regulation forbidding students from wearing "provocative symbols" upon their clothing was unconstitutionally "vague, broad, and imprecise" in derogation of the precepts of both the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. Appellee does not argue this determination on appeal hence we will not discuss it.

Although the plaintiff-appellant was suspended pursuant to a regulation that was subsequently determined to be unconstitutional, the District Court apparently felt that the suspension was nevertheless valid for the reason that the suspension would have been a legitimate exercise of the school officials' inherent authority to curtail disruption of the educational process even in the absence of a regulation. This Court agrees with the District Court's finding.

Turning now to the substance of this appeal we note that counsel for appellant has engaged in a proselytizing diatribe bordering on the edge of uncivility at the most, and poor professional taste at the least, in an effort to expand the issues facing this Court. In our view the only question for determination is whether a public high school student's suspension for his unwillingness to stop wearing a Confederate flag patch was violative of the First and Fourteenth Amendments under the circumstances in existence at the time of the suspension?

This is a troubling case; on the one hand we are faced with the exercise of the fundamental constitutional right to freedom of speech, and on the other with the oft conflicting, but equally important, need to maintain decorum in our public schools so that the learning process may be carried out in an orderly manner. It is abundantly clear that this Court will not uphold arbitrary or capricious restrictions on the exercise of such jealously guarded and vitally important constitutional tenets. However, it is contended here that the circumstances at the time of appellant's suspension were such that the District Court could properly find that

> "[t]he Principal had every right to anticipate that a tense, racial situation continued to exist at Brainerd

> High School as of the school [sic] in September of 1970 and that repetition of the previous year's disorders might reoccur if student use of the Confederate symbol was permitted to resume."

It is our view after an independent examination[3] of the record that the conclusions of the District Court are fully supported by the evidence.

In the leading case of *Tinker* v. *Des Moines Independent Community School District,* 393 U.S. 503, the Supreme Court stated, inter alia, that student conduct which "materially disrupts class work or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others" is not afforded the cloak of protection provided by the First Amendment. Recognizing the problems discussed in *Tinker,* this Court, in the case of *Guzick* v. *Debrus,* 431 F. 2d 594 (1970) indicated its belief that

> " . . . the potentiality and imminence of the admitted rebelliousness in the Shaw students support the wisdom of the no-symbol rule. Surely those charged with providing a place and atmosphere for educating young Americans should not have to fashion their disciplinary rules only after good order has been at least once demolished."

In this regard it should be noted that District Judge Frank Wilson's opinion reflects a careful and studied consideration of the precepts of *Tinker* and its application to the case before the Court. In the language of the trial court

> "Unlike the *Tinker* case, where the Court found no evidence of either actual or potential disruptive conduct,

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[3] *Edwards* v. *South Carolina,* 372 U.S. 229, 235 (1963); *Jacobellis* v. *Ohio,* 378 U.S. 184, 189 (1964).

but only an 'undifferentiated fear or apprehension of disturbance,' the record in the present case reflects quite clearly that there was substantial disorder at Brainerd High School throughout the 1969-70 school year, that this disorder most materially disrupted the functioning of the school, so much so that the school was in fact closed upon two occasions, that much of the controversy the previous year had centered around the use of the Confederate flag as a school symbol and that the school officials had every right to anticipate that a tense racial situation continued to exist as of the opening of school in September of 1970."

We conclude that this determination is fully supported by the evidence presented to the Court. We also think that Judge Wilson was correct in his determination that *Guzick, supra,* permitted the school authorities to stave off any potential danger resulting from appellant's conduct.[4]

It is therefore our conclusion that under all of the circumstances herein presented that appellant's suspension was not violative of his First and Fourteenth Amendment rights and that the judgment below was proper.

Affirmed.

MILLER, *Circuit Judge,* dissenting. The plaintiff in this case, Rod Melton, a student at Brainerd High School in Chattanooga, was suspended from school by the Principal because of his refusal to cease wearing a small shoulder patch sewn on one sleeve of his jacket and depicting the Confederate Flag. The sole reason for such suspension, as found by the district court and established by the evi-

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[4] See also *Norton* v. *Discipline Committee of East Tennessee State University,* 419 F.2d —— (6th Cir. 1969).

dence, was that the student, in the judgment of the Principal, had violated that portion of a school code of conduct which provided as follows: *"Also, provocative symbols on clothing will not be allowed."* The district court held, and I think correctly so, that this regulation was invalid and unenforceable because of its vagueness and lack of specificity. If the rule under the sole authority of which the student was suspended is invalid because it infringed upon the rights of the student to freedom of speech and expression, as the district court clearly held, it follows, in my opinion, that the student was entitled to have the suspension itself declared illegal and to have the benefit of the injunctive relief which he sought by his complaint.

It is interesting to note that the district court, in invalidating this provision of the code, stated:

> "Although elsewhere in the regulations Confederate symbols were barred from use as school symbols and although there is evidence that the words 'provocative symbols' were construed by the school principal to mean 'that which would cause a substantial disruption of the student body,' such an interpretation is subjective to the principal, for nowhere in the regulatory scheme are the words 'provocative symbols' defined."

Yet the district court proceeded in its opinion to find that the Principal had every reason to believe, because of the disturbances which occurred in the prior school year, the wearing of the shoulder patch was provocative and might lead to a disruption of the proper functions of the school. If his judgment in construing the regulation was subjective to him when he undertook to apply the code of conduct and assigned such code as the sole reason for

suspension, it is difficult for me to fathom why his judgment should not be regarded equally as subjective in attempting to assess the validity of the suspension upon the hypothetical assumption of the district court that the Principal could have acted, although he did not, on the basis of his inherent authority over the operation of the school.

Since the Principal acted pursuant to the regulation alone and that regulation is void, it necessarily follows that the student's constitutional rights were infringed and that he is entitled to appropriate relief. One cannot escape the conclusion that if the regulation itself is void on its face it cannot be validly applied in fact as the Principal in this case sought to do.

But even accepting the district court's premise that the Principal's action in suspending the student because of his refusal to remove the emblem is not dependent upon the validity of the regulation, I still hold the view that the district court's conclusion that the student's constitutional rights were not infringed is wrong.

I do not in any way quarrel with the finding of the district court with respect to the tense racial situation and disturbances which disrupted the school in the 1969-70 school year. As the district court, as well as the special Citizens Committee, found, the disturbances which occurred during that year were provoked primarily because of the use of a number of official or semi-official school symbols which appeared to be offensive to a minority group of the students in the school, including (a) the name "The Rebels" to designate the school's athletic teams; (b) the song "Dixie"; and (c) the "Confederate Flag." No finding was made with regard to the individual wearing of shoulder patches or insignia. It was recommended by the Commit-

tee, followed by later approval by the Board of Education, that the name "Rebel" or "Rebels" be retained, but that the Confederate Flag as a school symbol and the use of the song "Dixie" as a school pep song should be discontinued. These recommendations were implemented as codes of conduct at each of the schools, including the provision with respect to "provocative symbols" which the district court has held to be invalid.

The evidence in this case clearly brings it within the ambit of *Tinker* v. *Des Moines School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969). It is my firm conviction that the Principal in suspending the student simply over-reacted and was motivated by the kind of "undifferentiated fear and apprehension of disturbance" which the court in *Tinker* held to be insufficient to overcome the right to freedom of expression. True enough, in this case the Principal was aware of the disturbances which had occurred during the prior school year, but he failed to take into account, in acting so hastily and precipitately, the following differentiating factors which appear to me to be of controlling significance:

1. The protests of the previous year were against a group of school symbols which by long usage and custom, if not by express official sanction, carried the impact of official sanction, whereas the wearing of the small sleeve insignia in this case by a single student could in no way represent an official ruling or have the appearance of doing so.

2. In the early part of the 1970-71 school year (in September) a football game was played by the school team when some students imprudently and in violation of the school's code of conduct waved Confederate flags, with no

resulting protests or outbreaks of violence, indicating a lessening of racial tension at the school.

3. In the interim between school years, the Board of Education, acting upon the recommendation of a citizens committee which had made an intensive study of the events of 1969-70, mandated the discontinuance at Brainerd of the song "Dixie" and the Confederate Flag as *school symbols*, but retained the designation of "Rebels" for the school's athletic teams. If such continued use officially of a term equally as suggestive of the Confederacy as the flag caused no disruption, it is difficult to conceive how the wearing of a confederate flag insignia could be seriously taken as disruptive.

4. There was no finding by the Committee that the wearing of confederate symbols on clothing by individual students as matters of personal choice had contributed to the previous trouble or that it should be prohibited for the future.

5. The complaints received by the Principal concerning this student's display of the Confederate Flag on his sleeve were, at best, minimal if not trivial.

6. As of the time this student was suspended there had been no acts of violence at the school and no significant threats of disruption, despite the continued "official" use of the team name "Rebels" and the events at the opening football game. There was every reason to believe that the official steps taken by the School Board in abolishing the school song and flag had satisfied the demands of those who protested the year before.

7. The nature of the "symbolism" in this case, (entitled under *Tinker* to the same reverence as "pure speech") is of significance: It was small; it was worn as a part of an article of clothing; and it had no inherent qualities for causing disruption or disturbance.

8. The emblem was worn by the student in a quiet, peaceful and dignified manner with no untoward gestures or remarks.[1]

9. The Principal conducted no substantial inquiry to ascertain the true facts as to whether the wearing of the insignia would lead to further trouble.

The fact is that despite the racial strife of the year before the circumstances were altogether different in the school year beginning in the fall of 1970, and there is no substantial basis to support the Principal's apprehension and fear that a small emblem worn by a single student on the sleeve of his jacket, which was merely symbolic of one of the historic facts of American life, would activate anew the kind of turmoil which had previously existed and which had been caused by entirely different circumstances. After all, it should be emphasized, the school symbols which were discontinued, such as the song "Dixie" and the Confederate Flag, at least bore the appearance of officialdom and could hardly be compared with the personal choice of a single student to decorate his jacket with a harmless emblem of the Confederate Flag.

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[1] There was evidence pro and con as to the student's conduct in connection with prior racial situations, but the district court made no finding, and the record justifies none, that he was a troublemaker or that he wore the insignia other than for the purposes stated by him. His stated purpose was to indicate his pride in his Confederate heritage.

The language of the Fifth Circuit in *Blackwell* v. *Issaquena County Board of Education*, 363 F.2d 744, 748 (1966), appears to me to be pertinent in the present context:

> . . . . Thus it appears that the presence of "freedom buttons" did not hamper the school in carrying on its regular schedule of activities; nor would it seem likely that the simple wearing of buttons unaccompanied by improper conduct would ever do so. Wearing buttons on collars or shirt fronts is certainly not in the class of those activities which inherently distract students and break down the regimentation of the classroom such as carrying banners, scattering leaflets, and speechmaking, all of which are protected methods of expressions, but all of which have no place in an orderly classroom. If the decorum had been so disturbed by the presence of the "freedom buttons," the principal would have been acting within his authority and the regulation forbidding the presence of buttons on school grounds would have been reasonable.

Since no question is made on appeal as to the validity of the district court's ruling in striking down the "provocative symbol" regulation, I would reverse the remainder of the judgment and remand the case with directions to modify the judgment below so as to grant the injunctive relief sought and for further proceedings on the issue of damages.

Order of the United States Court of Appeals Denying Petition for Rehearing

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS

FOR THE SIXTH CIRCUIT

No. 71-1704

FILED
Nov 21 1972

JAMES A. HIGGINS, Clerk

BRYAN MELTON and wife, MRS. BRYAN MELTON, on behalf of their minor son, ROD MELTON,

Plaintiffs-Appellants,

—v.—

CORLEY R. YOUNG, *et al.* (Chattanooga, Tenn. Board of Education, Commissioner and Principal),

Defendants-Appellees.

(Petition for rehearing (with the suggestion for rehearing en banc), and motion to strike.)

Before:

MILLER, *Circuit Judge,* KENT, *Circuit Judge* and KEITH,* *District Judge.*

This cause is before the Court on the petition of Rod Melton, appellant, for a rehearing (with the suggestion that

* Honorable Damon J. Keith, United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan, sitting by designation.

the rehearing be en banc) of the opinion and decision of this Court rendered on August 30, 1972. If a rehearing en banc is denied, the appellant requests, in the alternative, a rehearing with Judge Keith "recused."

Inasmuch as the applicable time period has expired and there has been no request that there be a rehearing by a judge in regular active service or a judge who was a member of the panel that rendered the decision sought to be reheard, it is appropriate for this Court to deny the petition in its entirety. Rule 35(b), Fed. Rules App. Proc.

It is ORDERED that the petition for rehearing (with the suggestion that the rehearing be en banc) be and is hereby denied, and

It is ORDERED that the motion to strike is denied for frivolousness.

ENTERED BY THE ORDER OF THE COURT

JAMES A. HIGGINS
Clerk, United States Court of
Appeals, Sixth Circuit

Opinion of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee

BRYAN MELTON, and wife, MRS. BRYAN MELTON, on behalf of their minor son, ROD MELTON,

—v.—

CORLEY R. YOUNG *et al.*

Civ. A. No. 6018

United States District Court,
E. D. Tennessee, S. D.

June 19, 1971.

OPINION

FRANK W. WILSON, *Chief Judge.*

This lawsuit, involving the suspension of a high school student from a public school, presents two issues of federal constitutional dimension. One issue is whether a public school regulation forbidding students from wearing "provocative symbols" upon their clothing is violative of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. The second issue presented is whether the suspension of a student for refusal to cease wearing a shoulder patch consisting of a replica of the Confederate flag was violative of the First and Fourteenth Amendments under the circumstances shown to have been existing within the school at the time of the suspension.

At an initial hearing upon a motion for preliminary injunction held shortly after the suspension of the student, an understanding was reached whereby the student agreed to return to school without further wearing the Confederate

emblem pending a final decision of this lawsuit and the school authorities, who are the defendants herein, agreed that the return of the student to school under such circumstances would be permitted and would not constitute a waiver of any issues sought to be raised by the plaintiff in the lawsuit, nor would it render moot any such issue. A preliminary order was entered pursuant to this agreement of the parties.

It may appropriately be noted that although in the initial stages of this lawsuit the plaintiffs made certain contentions regarding denial of procedural due process and denial of equal protection of the law in connection with their son's suspension, at a pretrial conference the plaintiffs' counsel advised that in the interest of assuring a decision upon the merits of the plaintiffs' freedom of speech contentions made pursuant to the First and Fourteenth Amendments, the plaintiffs did not intend to pursue further their contentions regarding lack of procedural due process or denial of equal protection of the laws in the manner in which the suspension was accomplished. Furthermore, it appears to the Court from the evidence that the procedure by which the suspension was accomplished was fundamentally fair and regular and that there were no violations of either procedural due process or equal protection of the laws in connection therewith. As will be noted more fully hereinafter, the student was at all times fully advised as to the nature of the infraction with which he was charged and was afforded opportunities both for correction of the infraction and for hearings in connection with his suspension. The evidence is found insufficient to establish arbitrary action or discrimination in the suspension procedure followed.

The evidence in this case is voluminous and encompasses many matters that are of only peripheral relevance. Al-

though the parties filed extensive stipulations of fact, an additional five days was taken up in testimony. A substantial portion of the testimony now appears to have been repetitious of matters set forth in the stipulations.

The relevant facts appear to be largely undisputed and they are as follows: Brainerd High School is one of five public high schools operated by the School Board for the City of Chattanooga, Tennessee. At the time that a dual school system was being operated by the City for black and white students, Brainerd High School was operated as an all white school. During the period it was being so operated the student body had adopted the name "Rebel" as the school nickname and the practice had developed of using the Confederate flag as the school flag and the song "Dixie" as the school pep song. As a result of this Court's order, the school was desegregated in 1966 and since that time the student body has been composed of both races. At the commencement of the school year 1969 the racial composition of the student body consisted of 1,224 white students and 170 black students. During the initial years of desegregation there appears to have been no significant events within the student body tending to polarize the students along racial lines. Commencing with the opening of school in the fall of 1969, however, a series of events occurred which ultimately led not only to serious disruption within the school, resulting in the closing of the school upon two occasions in the spring of 1970, but also the disruption spread throughout the City of Chattanooga and resulted in a city-wide curfew being imposed in an effort to abate racial tensions and to restore order.

Whatever may have been the underlying causes and reasons for disharmony developing within the school, it is clear

that by the fall of 1969 the use of the Confederate flag as a school symbol, as well as the use of the song "Dixie" as the school pep song, had become an issue with a number of the black students. The first overt sign of this was a walkout by a number of black students at a school pep rally on September 9, 1969, in protest of the use of the Confederate flag and song. At a similar student pep rally on September 12, 1969, a larger group of black students walked out in protest of the symbol and song. On October 3, 1969, all black students walked out of a student pep rally, again in protest of the continued use of the flag and song. Up to this point the walkouts had been accomplished peacefully. At a school football game on the evening of October 3, 1969, however, serious trouble appears to have been narrowly averted when a group of black students left their seats in unison at the half time of the game and went upon the playing field where one or more of the students attempted to burn a Confederate flag. Police action was required on this occasion to restore order.

Polarization along racial lines now began to appear within the student body and altercations began to occur within the school with increasing frequency between black and white students. By this time students of both races appear to have been receiving outside encouragement for their respective positions regarding the school flag and song. The controversy over the flag and song were now spreading to the community.

On October 8, 1969, classes were disrupted for a period by a walkout of some 400 white students, soon followed by another 600 white students, in protest over reports that the Confederate flag and the song "Dixie" were to be dropped as the school symbol and pep song. Shortly before this

time, a student biracial committee had been established within the school and had suggested that the controversy over the school flag and song be resolved by a student vote. After some equivocation, this suggestion was rejected by school authorities.

On the evening of October 8, a sizeable motorcade drove through various parts of the City waving Confederate flags and otherwise expressing their partisanship. Also on this evening some 500 parents attended the School Board meeting to express their concern over the growing dissension at Brainerd High School and the apparent lack of effective disciplinary action.

During the night of October 11, 1969, a tense racial situation developed within the City when some 500 to 600 students and adults gathered in the Brainerd commercial area waving Confederate flags, singing "Dixie" and otherwise demonstrating their partisanship. In the meanwhile, a number of Negroes gathered nearby, likewise demonstrating their partisanship. Rocks and bottles were hurled at passing vehicles waving Confederate flags. A confrontation was avoided only after a number of arrests were made and after appeals were made by public officials to the crowds to disperse. In an effort to lessen the rising tensions within the City and to head off further racial confrontations, a city-wide curfew was imposed for four nights, from October 13 through October 17, 1969.

Throughout the remainder of the fall semester, considerable racial tension existed within the student body. Nighttime athletic events were rescheduled to be held in the afternoon. Sporadic fighting occurred between students of different races and some students were suspended from school. In January of 1970 a new principal, Dr. B. L. Von Schaaf,

was assigned to the school and a number of steps were taken to tighten discipline within the school.

During the spring of 1970 racial incidents continued to occur at the school and racial tensions continued to mount. On April 14, 1970, a major confrontation between black students and white students developed in the school cafeteria. Although this was broken up by school authorities without a fight having developed, the black students then refused to return to their classes for a time. When school was let out that afternoon, another major confrontation developed between the black and white students in the schoolyard, requiring the calling of some 40 policemen to restore order. Nine students were arrested upon this occasion.

The following day, April 15, racial tensions and racial incidents continued to mount. Black students gathered in the hallways and refused to go to classes. They stated that they were dissatisfied with school social clubs and extracurricular activities and would not be a part of the school so long as it maintained its present school symbols. Two fires of undetermined origin were discovered and put out in the school auditorium. It was again necessary to call a large number of police to maintain order and several altercations between students and police occurred. In an effort to restore order and to lessen tensions, it was announced that the school would be closed for the next two days, April 16 and 17. However, when classes were resumed the following week, racial turmoil promptly broke out again, resulting in student confrontations in the hallway, students refusing to go to class, fights, rock throwing, and other destructive actions being committed. Again a large number of police were called onto the campus, this time supported by city firemen. By April 22, 1970, it became necessary once

again to close the school, this time not to be reopened until April 28, 1970. In the meanwhile, extensive plans were made for further tightening school discipline, reassuring the faculty, who by this time had become concerned for their own safety, and otherwise planning for the reopening of the school.

Up to this time only a rather limited number of students had been suspended from school for participation in the disorders, the reason given being that in most instances group action was involved and individual responsibility could not be placed. However, for the remainder of the term a substantial number of suspensions were made for infraction of school rules. In addition, many regular school activities were curtailed, particularly those scheduled to occur in the evening or off of school premises.

In the latter part of May 1970, a committee of nine prominent citizens was appointed by joint action of the school administration and the Brainerd High School P.T.A. This committee was assigned the task of reviewing the problems besetting the School throughout the past year and recommending corrective action for the following year. After extensive investigations the committee filed a report identifying seven factors as having been most significant in contributing to the tensions and disorder in the School during the past year. One such factor so identified was the symbolism being used by the School, or, more specifically, the nickname "Rebel," the Confederate flag, and the song "Dixie." Regarding these the committee stated: "The focal point of the single factor most discussed was the problem of symbols, that is, (a) the name 'Rebel,' (b) the song 'Dixie,' and (c) the Confederate flag." Regarding school symbols, the committee recommended that the name "Rebel" be retained, but that use of the Confederate flag as a school

symbol and use of the song "Dixie" as a school pep song be discontinued.

This portion of the committee's report along with other portions, were approved and adopted as school policy by the School Board at its meeting upon July 8, 1970. The School Board further directed at that time that prior to the opening of school in September 1970 the principal in each school within the system develop a code of student conduct and make distribution of the same at the opening of school. In response to this directive, Dr. Von Schaaf and his staff revised and implemented a code for student conduct that initially had been developed in the spring of 1970. Among other rules contained in this code was the following: "Also, provocative symbols on clothing will not be allowed."

At the opening of school in the latter part of August 1970, orientation sessions were held at Brainerd High School, both with students and with their parents, and the above named rules, along with other information, were distributed and discussed. At the same time students and parents were advised as follows: "According to the Board of Education July 8, 1970 meeting, the status of symbols for Brainerd High School is as follows: 'The Confederate flag and Confederate soldier cannot be used as symbols for any public school in Chattanooga; therefore, all displays of the flag and soldier are removed from the school premises and cannot be used in any display where Brainerd is involved.'" The plaintiff, Rod Melton, as well as his parents, who are also plaintiffs, were advised of these matters at that time and received copies of the rules and of the other information referred to.

So much by way of background. Turning to the immediate facts giving rise to this lawsuit, the following relevant matters appear largely, if not wholly, undisputed in the

record: The plaintiff, Rod Melton, first entered Brainerd High School during the year 1969. He was in the junior class during the school year 1969-70, and attended school throughout that year. He was present as a witness to many of the events indicated above and was himself involved upon one or more occasions, at least to the extent of separating the combatants. He also received a short disciplinary suspension from school during the year for wearing an outer garment with a cross and the letters "KKK" upon it.

On September 8, 1970, the plaintiff, Rod Melton, wore a jacket to school having an emblem depicting the Confederate flag sewn on one sleeve. During the course of the morning the matter was reported to Dr. Von Schaaf by a faculty member and the plaintiff was sent to the principal's office. He was there requested by the principal to remove the emblem or cease wearing the jacket while attending school, but he declined to do so. He was allowed to return to his class, but further complaints were received from both the faculty and students, including some six or ten black students, regarding his being allowed to wear the Confederate emblem in school. The principal thereupon again called the plaintiff to his office and requested that he remove the jacket, but the plaintiff again declined to do so. Stating that the emblem was provocative in his judgment and that it was a violation of the school code, Dr. Von Schaaf directed that the plaintiff either remove the jacket or leave the campus. He elected to leave campus.

The following day, September 9, 1970, the plaintiff, Rod Melton, again appeared at Brainerd High School wearing the same jacket with the Confederate symbol sewn on the sleeve. Once again he was sent to the principal's office and instructed to remove the jacket or the emblem. Again he

declined to do so, representing that his purpose in wearing the Confederate symbol on his jacket was merely to demonstrate his pride in his Confederate heritage and not for any other purpose. He was thereupon instructed to leave school and not return until he was willing to cease displaying the Confederate emblem on his clothing while in school. On the occasion of his suspension both upon September 8, 1970, and upon September 9, 1970, letters were sent by the principal to Rod Melton's parents advising them of the action taken and the reasons therefor. Further conferences were held between the principal and Mrs. Melton, but no resolution of the matter was reached. Thereupon this lawsuit was filed.

The foregoing is an abbreviated statement of the voluminous evidence placed in the record in this case. However, it is believed to adequately state the facts essential to the decision of the case. Each of the parties introduced considerable other evidence which at most was only of limited relevance. Among such evidence introduced by the plaintiffs was the following: (a) that the Confederate flag, rather than standing for slavery and the degradation of the black race, is an honored emblem standing for bravery and other patriotic virtues; (b) that little or no effort was made by school authorities to educate black students to the true meaning of the Confederate flag; (c) that black students were incited by black militants to protest the Brainerd High School symbols in the fall of 1969; (d) that the failure of school authorities to use firm discipline, particularly in the early stages of black student protests, was a contributing factor to matters getting out of hand at later stages in the year; and (e) that other symbols of a provocative nature, such as the black fist, the Afro hair style, and the peace symbol, were permitted to be worn or displayed by students on

the school premises. On the other hand, the defendants, in addition to going into extensive detail regarding each of the events recounted above, sought to introduce evidence that the plaintiff, Rod Melton, had engaged in activities on other occasions, both prior to and subsequent to his suspension, reflecting a strong partisanship in racial matters. The plaintiffs introduced rebutting proof on these matters and sought to show that young Melton was a well behaved and honor student.

As stated, the Court is of the opinion that each of the foregoing matters is only of limited relevance. There would appear to be no genuine relevance between the plaintiff's racial attitudes as expressed on other occasions and whether his right to free expression was curtailed on September 8 and 9, 1970, to an extent not permitted by the Federal Constitution. The plaintiffs' contentions regarding black aggression in placing the school symbols in controversy and regarding the alleged failure of the School to educate black students in regard to the school symbols or to discipline them in their protests against the symbols do not alter the fact that school officials had every right to anticipate that a tense racial situation continued to exist as of the opening of school in September of 1970. Nor do these contentions of the plaintiffs alter the fact that much of the controversy the previous year had centered around the use of the Confederate flag as a school symbol. To the extent that the plaintiffs may contend that prior errors in school administration limited the principal in taking corrective action in September of 1970, the contention is clearly without merit. The principal was confronted with the assignment of operating the school under the facts as they existed in September of 1970, regardless of how those facts might have been changed had no prior errors been committed. When applied

on a larger scale, such reasoning would lead to the assertion that had no errors been committed prior to 1860, no Civil War would have occurred, with the consequence that no Confederate flag would have come into existence. "Dixie" would have remained a minstrel song, and the word "rebel" would have remained a generic word.

Before turning to the two specific constitutional issues presented in this case, certain general propositions of law should be noted. First and foremost of these is the specific relevant language of the First Amendment wherein it is provided: "Congress shall make no law * * * abridging the freedom of speech * * * " Although the language of the First Amendment is a limitation upon the power of Congress, the principle is now firmly established that the concept of due process as contained in the Fourteenth Amendment incorporates all of the fundamental rights contained within the First Amendment, including freedom of speech, and accordingly forbids any state abridgement thereof. Tinker v. Des Moines, 393 U.S. 503, 89 S.Ct. 733, 21 L.Ed.2d 731 (1969); Talley v. Calif., 362 U.S. 60, 80 S.Ct. 536, 4 L.Ed.2d 559 (1960). Whenever any public body acts so as to injure the person or property or restrict the freedom of an individual, the Constitution requires that such action be consonant with due process of law. As noted, the First Amendment does not speak equivocally, but rather is broad and explicit in its scope. Regulatory measures, no matter how well intentioned or how sophisticated, cannot be employed by public bodies if their purpose or effect is to stifle, penalize, or curb the exercise of rights guaranteed by the First Amendment.

Upon the other hand, it should likewise be noted that the right of free speech is one of many rights guaranteed by the Constitution and accordingly must be interpreted in

harmony with and so as not to infringe upon other rights equally secured by the Constitution. That is, freedom of speech is not an absolute right. Terminiello v. Chicago, 337 U.S. 1, 69 S.Ct. 894, 93 L.Ed. 1131, reh. den. 337 U.S. 934, 69 S.Ct. 1490, 93 L.Ed. 1740 (1948). The exercise of free expression must on occasion be subject to some limitations, otherwise such institutions as churches, schools, and other places of public assembly, not to mention the courtrooms themselves, would become Towers of Babel. Under the Constitution Society has an interest in free expression. Under the same Constitution Society also has many other interests, including the operation of schools. Wholly apart from any incitation, no thoughtful person would suggest that a student should be permitted to stand and sing "Dixie" in a classroom as the mood might strike him, nor even to recite the Oath of Allegiance in so unregulated a manner. Reasonable and non-discriminatory regulations of time, place, and manner are always permissible restrictions upon expression. Expression can never be limited, however, merely because of disagreement with or dislike for its content.

Finally, it should be noted that "symbolic speech," although not always readily distinguishable from conduct and accordingly somewhat ill-defined in the law, is accorded First Amendment protection the same as "pure speech." See Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503, 89 S.Ct. 733, 21 L.Ed.2d 731 (1969), wherein the Court held that wearing of arm bands "is closely akin to 'pure speech.'" See also Cox v. Louisiana, 379 U.S. 559, 85 S.Ct. 476, 13 L.Ed.2d 487 (1965); Hodsdon v. Buckson, 310 F.Supp. 528 (D.C. Del. 1970).

Turning to the specific constitutional issues presented for decision in this case, the Court must first decide whether

a public school regulation forbidding students from wearing "provocative symbols" upon their clothing under penalty of possible suspension from school is violative of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. The specific regulation here involved provides: "Also, provocative symbols on clothing will not be allowed." Although elsewhere in the regulations Confederate symbols were barred from use as school symbols and although there is evidence that the words "provocative symbols" were construed by the school principal to mean "that which would cause a substantial disruption of the student body," such an interpretation is subjective to the principal, for nowhere in the regulatory scheme are the words "provocative symbols" defined.

Vague laws or regulations in any area are likely to suffer a constitutional infirmity. The likelihood of constitutional infirmity is greatly enhanced where First Amendment rights may be affected by the laws or regulations. As stated by the Court in the case of Ashton v. Kentucky, 384 U.S. 195, 86 S.Ct. 1407, 16 L.Ed.2d 469 (1966): "Vague laws in any area suffer a constitutional infirmity. When First Amendment rights are involved, we look even more closely lest, under the guise of regulating conduct that is reachable by the police power, freedom of speech . . . [may] suffer."

Accordingly, precision and specificity are essential to the validity of a public law or regulation affecting freedom of speech if the law or regulation is to pass constitutional muster under the First and Fourteenth Amendments. In this regard, see Keyishian v. Board of Regents of University of State of New York, 385 U.S. 589, 87 S.Ct. 675, 17 L.Ed.2d 629 (1967), wherein the Court stated:

"We emphasize once again that 'precision of regulation must be the touchstone in an area so closely touching

> our most precious freedoms, * * * for standards of permissible statutory vagueness are strict in the area of free expression * * * Because First Amendment freedoms need breathing space to survive, government may regulate in the area only with narrow specificity.' "

The word "provocative" is defined by Webster to mean "serving or tending to provoke, excite, stimulate, or incense * * * especially to stir up controversy or discussion." Accordingly, under any such definition, the words "provocative symbols" may encompass an almost limitless number and variety of symbols. The barring of "provocative symbols" under penalty of possible suspension from a public school is clearly too vague, broad, and imprecise a regulation to be allowed to stand before the requirements of either the First or the Fourteenth Amendments. As emphasized in the case of Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, *supra,* limitations on the use of symbols or other activity closely akin to "pure speech" are permissible only in carefully restricted circumstances. The prohibition of all "provocative symbols" is clearly beyond these restrictive bounds. See also Stromberg v. California, 283 U.S. 359, 51 S.Ct. 532, 75 L.Ed. 1117 (1930).

The striking of the "provocative symbols" regulation from the Brainerd High School student code does not resolve all issues in this lawsuit. Although the principal cited the regulation in support of his action in ordering the plaintiff to remove the Confederate flag shoulder emblem while attending school on September 8 and 9, 1970, the validity of the principal's action in ordering the removal of the emblem or in suspending the plaintiff upon his refusal to do so is not dependent upon the validity of the regulation. A public school principal is charged under

Tennessee law with the responsibility for the operation of the school to which he is assigned. His authority in this regard is commensurate with his charge. See T.C.A. § 49-1309; Phillips v. Johns, 12 Tenn.App. 354 (1930). A public school principal is responsible for maintaining such discipline and order within the school as will permit the educational processes to be carried out. His plenary authority in this regard is not dependent upon the adoption of a written code of student conduct in each school, although the latter may be the desirable practice.

Accordingly, there remains for decision the issue of whether the suspension of a student for refusal to cease wearing a shoulder patch consisting of a replica of the Confederate flag was violative of the First and Fourteenth Amendments under the circumstances shown to have been existing within Brainerd High School at the time of the suspension.

As previously noted, the right of free expression is not absolute or without limits. For one thing, reasonable and non-discriminatory regulation of time, place, and manner are permissible. Another limitation, historically speaking, is that permitted by the clear and present danger rule. The usual statement of law in this regard is that a limitation of free speech may be permissible if it is justified by clear public interest, threatened not doubtfully or remotely, but by clear and present danger. In this regard see Schenck v. United States, 249 U.S. 47, 39 S.Ct. 247, 63 L.Ed. 470 (1918), wherein Justice Holmes made his classic observation that "The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting *fire* in a theatre and causing a panic."

More specific to the problem here presented, however, are the principles and guidelines laid down in the recent

case of Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503, 89 S.Ct. 733, 21 L.Ed.2d 731 (1969). The facts there presented were that students were suspended from a public school when they refused to remove black armbands worn in protest against the war in Viet Nam, the wearing of such armbands being a violation of a school regulation directed specifically thereto. The Court held that the First Amendment right of freedom of speech was available to teachers and students within the schoolhouse as well as without and that the wearing of black armbands by the students as a symbolic act, entirely divorced from actually or potentially disruptive conduct, was closely akin to "pure speech" and therefore entitled to comprehensive protection under the First Amendment. The Court concluded that, upon the record presented, the action of the school authorities appeared to have been based upon the desire to avoid controversy in that there was no evidence that the school authorities had any reason to anticipate that the wearing of the armbands would substantially interfere with the work of the school or impinge upon the rights of other students or that the prohibition was necessary to avoid material and substantial interference with school functions. Holding that a student may express controversial opinions so long as he does so without materially and substantially interfering with appropriate discipline in the operation of the school and without abridging the rights of others, the Court struck down the armband regulation as violative of the First Amendment.

Relying significantly upon two Fifth Circuit cases decided in 1966 (Burnside v. Byars, 363 F.2d 744, and Blackwell v. Issaquena County Board of Education, 363 F.2d 749) in one of which a school regulation banning the wear-

ing by students of civil rights freedom buttons was stricken down and in the other of which the same regulation was sustained because of differing circumstances prevailing in the two schools, the Supreme Court used the following language that is of particular relevance to the facts of the principal case:

> "A student's rights, therefore, do not embrace merely the classroom hours. When he is in the cafeteria, or on the playing field, or on the campus during the authorized hours, he may express his opinions, even on controversial subjects like the conflict in Vietnam, if he does so without 'materially and substantially interfering with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school' and without colliding with the rights of others. Burnside v. Byars, *supra,* 363 F.2d at 749. But conduct by the student, in class or out of it, which for any reason—whether it stems from time, place, or type of behavior—materially disrupts class work or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others is, of course, not immunized by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech. Cf. Blackwell v. Issaquena County Board of Education, 363 F.2d 749 (5th Cir. 1966)."

Unlike the *Tinker* case, where the Court found no evidence of either actual or potential disruptive conduct, but only an "undifferentiated fear or apprehension of disturbances," the record in the present case reflects quite clearly that there was substantial disorder at Brainerd High School throughout the 1969-70 school year, that this disorder most materially disrupted the functioning of the school, so much so that the school was in fact closed upon two occasions,

that much of the controversy the previous year had centered around the use of the Confederate flag as a school symbol, and that the school officials had every right to anticipate that a tense racial situation continued to exist as of the opening of school in September of 1970. Under these circumstances Brainerd High School officials were not required to wait until another disruption occurred before restricting the use of the symbol previously found to have caused the disruption or to have contributed to the causing of the disruption.

In the recent case of Guzick v. Drebus, 431 F.2d 594 (1970), a case decided since the *Tinker* decision, the Court of Appeals of this Circuit, after discussing the *Tinker* case, upheld a public school no-symbol rule. In so doing, the Court stated, among other matters, the following:

> "In our view, the potentiality and the imminence of the admitted rebelliousness in the Shaw students support the wisdom of the no-symbol rule. Surely those charged with providing a place and atmosphere for educating young Americans should not have to fashion their disciplinary rules only after good order has been at least once demolished."

The suspension of the plaintiff by the principal of Brainerd High School for refusing to cease wearing, while at school, a Confederate flag as a shoulder patch, was not based merely upon the principal's disagreement with nor dislike for the symbol. On the contrary, the principal stated he had no personal objection to the symbol. Nor was it prompted by a mere desire on the principal's part to avoid the discomfort and unpleasantness that often accompany a controversial viewpoint. Rather, the evidence in this

case is quite overwhelming that the Confederate symbol had been a cause of very serious, material and substantial disturbance in the school throughout the previous school year. The principal had every right to anticipate that a tense racial situation continued to exist at Brainerd High School as of the beginning of school in September of 1970 and that repetition of the previous year's disorders might reoccur if student use of the Confederate symbol was permitted to resume. Restricting the use of the Confederate symbol within the school under the circumstances existing within Brainerd High School at the time of the plaintiff's suspension accordingly was not violative of the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

An order will enter in accordance with this opinion.

A few further words seem appropriate. Our schools are living through difficult and controversial times. In the midst of our present trials, it would be a grievous error for us to forget that this Nation and its institutions have survived other difficulties and other controversies. In times past our Nation and its institutions have drawn strength and not weakness from those difficulties. In times past our Nation and its institutions have drawn unity and not divisiveness from those controversies. After one of the most difficult and angry political contests within the history of this Nation, President Jefferson had the following to say in his first inaugural address. They are words which all of us, in our present difficulties, should take to heart, including students of both races at Brainerd High School.

> "During the contest of opinion through which we have passed, the animation of discussion • • • has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely and to speak and to write what

they think, but this being now decided by the voice of the Nation, announced according to the rules of the Constitution, all will, of course, arrange themselves under the will of the law and unite in common efforts for the common good. All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights which equal law must protect, and to violate which would be oppressive. Let us then, fellow citizens, unite with one heart and one mind. Let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty and even life itself are but dreary things."

Judgment of the United States District Court

IN THE

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE
SOUTHERN DIVISION

Civil Action No. 6018

BRYAN MELTON, *et al.*

—VS.—

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE, *et al.*

ORDER

This lawsuit, challenging the suspension of a high school student from a public school, presents two issues of federal constitutional dimension. One issue is whether a public school regulation forbidding students from wearing "provocative symbols" upon their clothing is violative of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. The second issue is whether the suspension of a student for refusal to cease wearing a shoulder patch consisting of a replica of the Confederate flag was violative of the First and Fourteenth Amendments under the circumstances shown to have been existing within the school at the time of the suspension.

Having considered the evidence presented at the hearing upon this matter, the stipulations of fact and the briefs of the parties and for the reasons set forth in an opinion filed herein, the Court enters the following orders.

It is accordingly ORDERED:

(1) That such portion of the Brainerd High Schoo Chattanooga, Tennessee, student conduct code as provides "also provocative symbols on clothing will not be allowed. will be stricken and for nothing further held, the same hav ing been found by the Court to be so broad, vague an imprecise as to violate the First and Fourteenth Amend ments of the Federal Constitution;

(2) That the suspension of the plaintiff, Rod Melto from Brainerd High School, Chattanooga, Tennessee, upo September 8 and 9, 1970, for refusal to cease wearing shoulder patch consisting of a replica of the Confederat flag was not violative of either the First or Fourteent Amendment or of any other provision of the Federal Co stitution under the circumstances existing within the sa school at the time of the suspension; and

(3) That except as hereinabove provided the plaintif be and they hereby are denied further relief with the cos of this cause being taxed unto the plaintiffs. This will co stitute the final order of the Court in this case.

APPROVED FOR ENTRY.

FRANK W. WILSON
United States District Judg